

# RESTORING A HISTORIC COMMERCIAL BUILDING



*A Workbook for Downtown Business and Property Owners*

May  
1999



## WHY RESTORE YOUR BUILDING?

**R**EHABILITATING a historic building should include preserving and restoring the historic character of the property, keeping and repairing its distinctive features, removing inappropriate materials, and using methods of cleaning that are non-abrasive.

**R**EHABILITATING a historic commercial building is important because it:

- ☐ Enhances its marketability as distinctive retail or office space
- ☐ Mitigates damage caused by inappropriate modifications
- ☐ Restores functional elements of a building

## WHAT'S THE PROCESS?

- ☐ Getting Started: Research and document (historic vs. current condition)
- ☐ Developing a workplan
- ☐ Doing the work



## WHAT DID BUILDINGS LOOK LIKE HISTORI-



Spanish Fork, Utah



Provo, Utah



Salina, Utah

**B**UILDINGS have always been the defining feature of the downtown landscape. Historically, each facade displayed distinctive architectural style and detail, but downtown's buildings shared certain common characteristics, creating a cohesive physical image. These characteristics included:

- Height and width
- Setback
- Materials
- Color
- Proportions of door and window openings
- Roof shape or profile



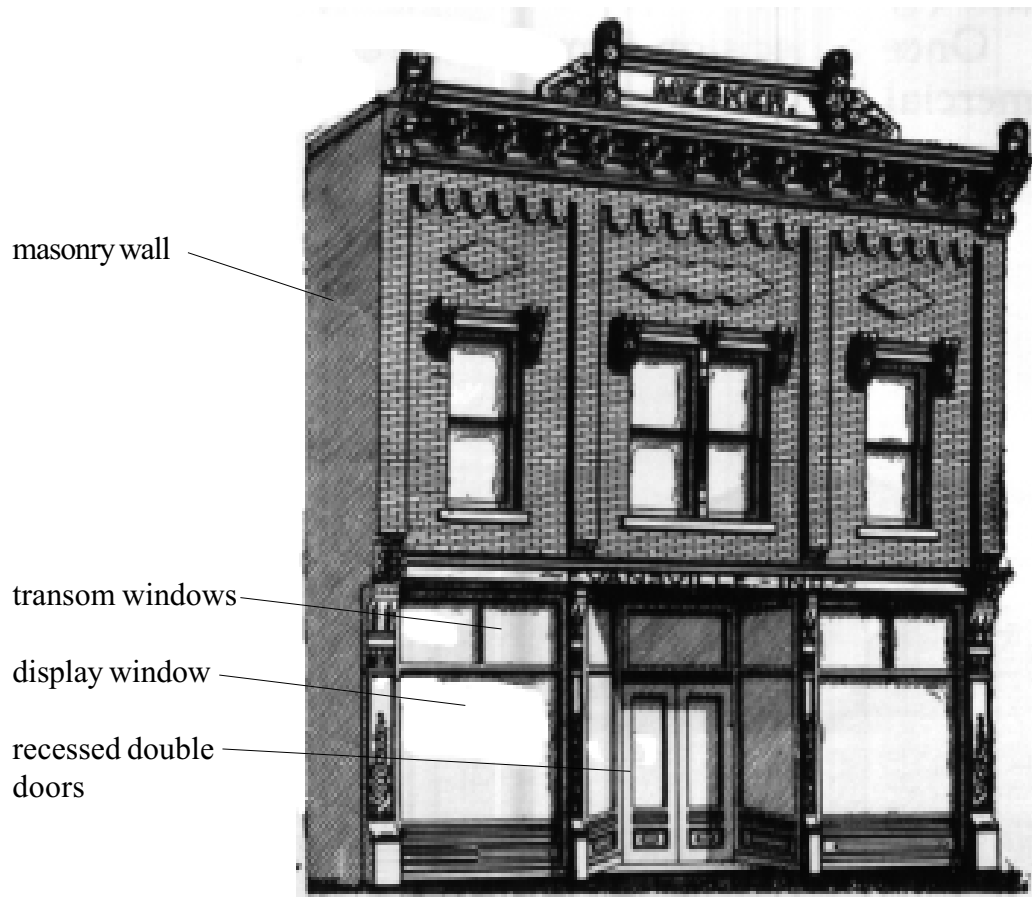
Ogden, Utah



Midvale, Utah

# IDENTIFYING THE HISTORIC STOREFRONT

## *Typical Storefront Facade:*



## *Glossary of Terms:*

- ☐ **Bulkhead:** The short wall below the display window, historically made of wood or tile.
- ☐ **Cornice:** Horizontal projecting brow at the top of the building or above the storefront; a cornice historically made of tin, but it can also be the top course of brick or made of wood.
- ☐ **Facade:** The front of the building.
- ☐ **Parapet:** Low, protective wall at the edge of a roof.
- ☐ **Pediment:** Low, centered gable (may be triangular) or element at top, center of facade.  
original state. (This highest level of historic preservation is rare and produces a museum-quality product.)
- ☐ **Signage:** Signs, lettered boards, or other displays used to identify or advertise a place of business.
- ☐ **Storefront:** The display window and entrance on the front side of a building; it does not include the second story.
- ☐ **Streetscape:** Includes buildings, landscaping, lighting, signage, public spaces, people, and traffic.
- ☐ **Transom:** One small window or group of small windows, which can often open, positioned above a door or larger storefront windows.

**I**N AN EFFORT to compete with new commercial centers, many downtown merchants and property owners “modernized” their buildings by installing inappropriate modifications that imitated the corporate design formulas of shopping malls and strip centers. In the process, they obscured or altered important historic features and compromised functional elements designed into the buildings.



“Slipcovers” created a neutral and bland facade.



Theme treatments contrived a false history for a building.



Large, garish signs dominated the storefront.



False roofs covered the upper facade.

# WHAT DO APPROPRIATE MODIFICATIONS LOOK



Before Restoration



After Restoration



Before Restoration



After Restoration



Before restoration.



After restoration.

## STEP ONE: GETTING STARTED (*Research and Documenta-*

### *Gathering historic information for a specific building:*

Research the building's age and history, including alterations and additions, it's present size and condition:

- ☐ **Age of the building:** Get clues to the building's age, what it originally looked like, what features it had, and what the alterations made to it over the years have been. This helps determine the scope of work needed to return the building to its original appearance, to help decide if there is enough of the original building left to rehabilitate.
- ☐ **Size of the building:** Measure the building and make a floor plan. Photograph the interior and the facade. Compare these to the historic photos. Make note of alterations and additions.
- ☐ **National Register of Historic Places or other listing (or is eligible):** Buildings considered for renovation can be listed on the National Register if it meets the qualifications to be an individual listing, a thematic listing, or a district listing. If it is, there may be financial incentives to implement and maintain a quality facade renovation project. Buildings that are not eligible should still be considered worthy of repairs, restoration and good maintenance. Contact SHPO for information regarding financial incentives.
- ☐ **Existing records:** To help in documenting the building's age (see below).
- ☐ **General condition of the building (and modifications):** Make a checklist of the condition.
  - Has the original facade been altered or covered up?
  - Have there been any additions?
  - Has the building had good, regular maintenance?

### *Existing records and where to find them :*

First, check to see whether the building has already been documented. The Office of Preservation at the Utah State Historical Society has files on thousands of buildings throughout the state. If there is no information on the building in the file, or if it is incomplete, you should check the following sources to complete the documentation:

- ☐ **1. Tax file:** (County Assessor's Office) – Obtain the tax serial number from the ownership plat maps and have the clerk pull the file for that property. Contains the legal description of the property, may be an estimated date of construction, and maybe a tax photo. Photocopy everything or copy down the name and address of the current owner and the legal description of the property on the Title Search Form. Use the legal description of the property to research the ownership of the property, as explained in #3. (S.L. Co. has moved many of its old tax files to its Records Management and Archives department, so check there if you can't find anything in the regular tax file.)
- ☐ **2. Tax photo:** (County Assessor's Office) Many exist from the 1930's. Take a photo of the original.
- ☐ **3. Title Abstracts:** (County Recorder's Office) – Organized by plat, block, and lot numbers for properties in incorporated areas; township, range, and section designations are used for unincorporated areas. Research all the transactions involving the property specified in the legal description, noting the dates, names of buyers and sellers, dollar amounts, and types of transactions (warranty deed, quit claim deed, mortgage, etc.). Copy the information on the important transactions onto the Title Search Form. Important transactions are those that involve the actual change of ownership or that might indicate when the building was constructed or altered. Indications of a construction date are the first relatively large mortgage or the dramatic increase in the selling price of the property. It is not necessary to copy down all of the later mortgages, tax sales, releases, etc. You may begin your search with the current owner and work your way back to the beginning, or vice versa.
- ☐ **4. Sanborn Maps:** – (USHS and Marriott Library, SLC) - The Historical Society has a list of which maps are available and where they are located.) These fire insurance maps were drawn for over 75 communities in Utah, many as early as the 1880s and were updated approximately every decade through the 1920s with some updates into the 1940s and later. The maps show each building, residential and commercial, color coded to indicate the various construction materials. By comparing the maps from different years, you can establish an approximate date of construction and can determine approximately when and what types of changes have been made to the building and surrounding property.
- ☐ **5. Building Permits:** (Salt Lake City only) 1890-1927, USHS Library; after 1927+, State Archives
- ☐ **6. Newspapers:** (USHS and Marriott Library) - Microfilm of many Utah community newspapers.



## ***Windows:***

- ☐ Uncover and repair transom windows (covered over when interior ceiling was lowered).
- ☐ Bevel or step up lowered ceilings to accommodate transoms.
- ☐ Repair wooden window frames, rather than replace.
- ☐ Keep style of window original; don't replace double-hung sash windows with fixed single pane glass or horizontal sliding windows.
- ☐ Use clear glass, not reflective or tinted.
- ☐ Use windows that match style of the building.
- ☐ Avoid creating a false sense of history. Retain historic window appearance.

## ***Lighting:***

- ☐ Maintain historic appearance of building while providing attractive and effective lighting for safety and advertising.
- ☐ Use lighting appropriate to historic period of building. Keep fixtures simple without obscuring any building ornament.
- ☐ Use lights to highlight ornamentation, window displays, signage, and entrances.
- ☐ No need to wash entire facade with light.
- ☐ Don't use fluorescent lights on facade, as they can be too harsh, bland and uniform.
- ☐ Make sure light fixtures are designed for outdoor use.

## ***Awnings:***

- ☐ Use traditional sloped awnings (don't use crown, umbrella or domed awnings).
- ☐ Use traditional awnings to control heat gain, lighting, protect from rain (can use as signage, also), and to compliment the architecture of building.
- ☐ Make them out of fabric (not plastic, vinyl or aluminum).
- ☐ Use colors that compliment the colors or materials of the storefront neighboring buildings and streetscape.
- ☐ Use awnings that are the right size, shape and color used historically.
- ☐ Fit awning into the frame of the window, door or storefront.
- ☐ Awnings shouldn't obscure architectural features.
- ☐ Keep upper story awnings proportional to size of windows.
- ☐ Install anchors to cause the least damage to building.
- ☐ Don't let awnings project too far out from building.
- ☐ Fabric awnings or horizontal rigid canopies were used historically on commercial buildings to provide shelter and sun protection. The use of awnings should be encouraged.
- ☐ Where original canopies or hardware survive, they should be preserved.
- ☐ Appropriate for use on most storefronts and on upper story windows, awnings can reinforce the color scheme of the facade.
- ☐ Awnings can create a unifying pattern when repeated along the block and should match the width of the storefront without obscuring important details.
- ☐ Awnings provide an opportunity to apply signage.
- ☐ Operable fabric awnings can be rolled up during winter storms to protect and extend life of material.

## ***Signage:***

- ☐ Simple and effective to advertise type of business in keeping with historic elements.
- ☐ Limit number of signs.
- ☐ Place signs in appropriate areas, including the sign band and storefront cornice.
- ☐ Light and highlight surface mounted or painted signs with indirect lighting, such as "goose neck" lights or remote spotlights.
- ☐ Don't obscure display windows or building's ornamentation.
- ☐ Don't use internally lit can signs - too modern.
- ☐ Make sure signs or logos are not out of scale with facade.
- ☐ Don't use neon or flashing signs unless historically appropriate.
- ☐ Don't create a marquee sign that projects out over the sidewalk, unless historically characteristic of the building.



## DEVELOPING A WORKPLAN (*Specific Issues*)

### ***Historic Materials:***

- ☐ The Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for Rehabilitation* requires that "deteriorated architectural features be repaired rather than replaced, wherever possible. In the event that replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in composition, design, color, texture, and other visual properties."
- ☐ Using the same historic material is preferred, and repairing is preferable to replacing. Repair broken brick with the same or similar brick, repoint brick with the same mortar, and replace sandstone with sandstone, etc.
- ☐ It is important to visually match what existed and to stop any further deterioration when repairing damaged features and replacing lost or irreparably damaged ones.
- ☐ Substitute materials should be used only on a limited basis and only when they will match the appearance and general properties of the historic material and will not damage the historic resource. It is not acceptable to cover up historic materials with synthetic material if it will alter the original appearance, proportions, or details of the historic building, or cause damage.
- ☐ Some substitute materials have been used successfully, such as epoxies for wood infilling, or cementitious patching compounds for repairing masonry.
- ☐ Substitution materials might be necessary if:
  - 1) the historic material is unavailable
  - 2) skilled craftsmen are unavailable (such as stone carvers)
  - 3) there are inherent flaws in the original material or details
  - 4) changes in code that may be destructive to historic resources
- ☐ Cost may or may not be a factor; yet when considering projected life and durability, it may be cheaper to use the original material. Make sure any substitute used is well researched and approved for use.

For further information see Sharon C. Park's "*The Use of Substitute Materials on Historic Building Exteriors.*" (Preservation Briefs 16). Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services Division, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1986.

### ***Historic Colors:***

- ☐ Paint analysis can be done to reveal a building's original color if careful restoration is desired.
- ☐ If not, the chosen colors should be appropriate to the building's age, natural materials used, and in harmony with neighboring buildings.
- ☐ Suppliers that offer free publications on historic architectural colors include: Sherwin Williams (216 / 566-2000) "Preservation Palette," Martin-Senour (800 / 542-8468) "Frank Lloyd Collection," Color Guild International (800 / 995-8885) "Historic Colors of America," and Benjamin Moore (800 / 772-4381) "Historic Color Collection."
- ☐ Also look in the library for Pattern Books from the 19th century which show suggested paint colors.
- ☐ It is important to keep the color scheme simple; use it to tie the storefront details with the upper story.

## ***Maintenance and Cleaning:***

- ☐ Use appropriate chemical cleaners and low pressure wash to clean dirt or remove paint from masonry walls.
- ☐ Make a small test patch to determine gentlest method.
- ☐ Don't use abrasive methods such as sand or bead blasting nor use wet or dry grit blasting or grinding. Avoid excessive water pressure (over 400 psi).
- ☐ Protect walls and roof from water infiltration.
- ☐ Repoint deteriorated mortar with compatible mortar.
- ☐ Repair or replace masonry units if needed. Repair gutter, flashing.
- ☐ Keep in good repair: maintain the roof, flashings, parapet caps.
- ☐ Don't use non-breathable sealants, caulking or wall surfacing such as synthetic siding or stucco to seal historic walls or as a fix to water infiltration.
- ☐ Keep wood trim painted and sealed from weather. Properly prepare the surface.
- ☐ Don't use aluminum or vinyl - it obscures detail, dents easily, traps in moisture.
- ☐ Repair first. Replace if necessary. Use original materials.

## ***Building Site:***

- ☐ Maintain relationship of historic building to the landscape within its boundaries that help to define its historic character.
- ☐ Site features include: driveways, walkways, lighting, fencing, benches, signs, landscaping, etc.
- ☐ Maintain site drainage to prevent erosion and damage.
- ☐ Keep the historic relationship between building and landscape features.
- ☐ Keep plants 18-24 inches from building.
- ☐ Direct sprinklers away from building.

## ***Rear of Building:***

- ☐ Develop and maintain secondary public access of commercial buildings, while preserving historic integrity.
- ☐ Benefit business through increased traffic.
- ☐ Create parking and green space in interior block.
- ☐ Need to consider how to handle security, circulation and displays through building.
- ☐ Want cohesive design of rear elevation, similar in materials and color of facade, so customers will recognize business.
- ☐ Identify back entry by using window panel in back door or small sign near door to identify store.
- ☐ Screen trash cans and utilities with wood, masonry, hedges, lattice to make it more attractive.
- ☐ Don't compete with the storefront.

## ***Addition of New Buildings in Historic Downtown:***

- ☐ Want compatibility with historic character of area. Maintain visual qualities of area.
- ☐ Do keep, save and repair historic buildings.
- ☐ Don't tear down buildings for a parking lot.
- ☐ Design new buildings with same basic size of surrounding buildings (height, width, setback and shape).
- ☐ Don't design facade as a solid mass. Break up facade into smaller components to resemble scale of existing buildings.
- ☐ Use similar window and door patterns.
- ☐ Don't design a building that exactly replicate the historic building. Use traditional shapes. Use compatible materials with existing buildings, such as brick, stone, wood, etc.
- ☐ Want diversity, yet want it unified.
- ☐ Uniqueness of downtown, its evolution of architectural styles (diversity), its shared characteristics with others (height, facade proportions, materials) give it a unity.
- ☐ Not all the same. Individuals. Not standardized.
- ☐ Don't want uniform color and material - can create blandness. Yet want compatibility, a unified appearance.

## STEP THREE: DOING THE

### ***Selecting a Contractor:***

An excellent source for names of Utah professionals in the preservation field is the *Utah Contractor Directory* which can be found at the Utah State Historic Preservation Office, 300 Rio Grande, SLC, UT 84101, (801) 533-3500. Remember, it's always a good idea to get references. This directory includes specialists in the following fields:

Architects (Preservation)  
Architectural Conservators  
Electrical Contractors  
Engineers  
Fine Art and Object Conservators  
Finish Carpenters / Woodcarvers  
Floor Refinishers  
Foundation and Basement Contractors  
General Contractors  
Historical Research Consultants  
House Movers  
Masonry Cleaner Suppliers

Masonry Cleaner Contractors  
Masonry Contractors  
Mechanical Contractors  
Mills  
Painting / Refinishing Contractors  
Roofing Contractors  
Roofing Product Representatives  
Roofing and Waterproofing Consultants  
Stucco / Decorative Plaster Contractors  
Suppliers  
Wallpaper Removal Contractors  
Window Rebuilders / Glaziers / Stained Glass Artisans



### ***Building codes / building inspections:***

Throughout the restoration process, there will be necessary building inspections done during each step of completion. Done by a Building Inspector, the work needs to pass various mandatory building codes in order for work to progress to the next step. If work is done through a general contractor, he / she takes care of scheduling these inspections (but it's always wise for the building owner to check up on this).

## RESOURCES

(Most publications are available for public use at the *Utah Division of State History / 300 Rio Grande, Salt Lake City, Utah 84101-1182 / 801-533-3500.*)

### Publications

Evans, Bill and Andrew Lawson. *Shopfronts*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1981.

Gayle, Margot and David W. Look and John G. Waite. *"Metals in America's Historic Buildings: Uses and Preservation Treatments."* Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services Division, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1980.

Gelbloom, Mara. *"Old Storefronts."* The OldHouse Journal VI, No. 3 (March 1978), pp. 2534.

Grimmer, Anne E. *"Dangers of Abrasive Cleaning to Historic Buildings."* (Preservation Briefs 6), Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services Division, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1979.

Hensley, Tom. *"The Preservation of Historic Pigmented Structural Glass (Vitrolite and Carrara Glass)."* Denver: Rocky Mountain Regional Office, National Park Service, 1981.

Jandl, H. Ward. *"Rehabilitating Historic Storefronts."* (Preservation Briefs 11). Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services Division, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1982.

Mack, Robert C., de Teel P. Tiller and James Askins. *"Repointing Mortar Joints in Historic Brick Buildings."* (Preservation Briefs 2). Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services Division, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1980.

Myers, John H. *"The Repair of Historic Wooden Windows."* (Preservation Briefs 9). Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services Division, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1980.

Park, Sharon C. *"Storefront Rehabilitation: A 19th Century Commercial Building."* Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services Division, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1980.

Phillips, Morgan W. and Dr. Judith E. Selwyn. *"Epoxies for Wood Repairs in Historic Buildings."* Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services Division, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1978.

*The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings.* Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services Division, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1980.

*Utah Contractor Directory.* Utah State Historic Preservation Office, 300 Rio Grande, SLC, UT 84101, (801) 533-3500.

Weeks, Kay D. and David W. Look. *"Exterior Paint Problems on Historic Woodwork."* (Preservation Briefs 10). Washington, D.C.: Technical Preservation Services, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1982.

### Web Sites:

Utah State Historical Society	( <a href="http://history.utah.org">http://history.utah.org</a> )
National Register of Historic Places	( <a href="http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/nrhome.html">http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/nrhome.html</a> )
National Trust for Historic Preservation	( <a href="http://www.nthp.org">http://www.nthp.org</a> )
Advisory Council on Historic Preservation	( <a href="http://www.achp.gov/mindex.html">http://www.achp.gov/mindex.html</a> )
Utah Pioneer Communities Program	( <a href="http://www.dced.state.ut.us/pioneer">http://www.dced.state.ut.us/pioneer</a> )
	( <a href="http://www.ce.ex.state.ut.us/pioneer">http://www.ce.ex.state.ut.us/pioneer</a> )
National Park Service Preservation Briefs	( <a href="http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/">http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/</a> )

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